

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR THE
CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW PICNIC AREA
SOUTH COVE, ARIZONA
LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA**

INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS), Lake Mead National Recreation Area (NRA), has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) that evaluates the no-action and one action alternative related to the construction of a new picnic area at South Cove, Arizona. The work would include installing three picnic sites with grills, tables, shade structures, walks, and one additional restroom.

Lake Mead NRA is located in southeastern Nevada and northwestern Arizona. South Cove, Arizona, is located on the eastern portion of Lake Mead, in northwestern Arizona. It is one of the major access points to Lake Mead from Arizona. It is approximately 10 miles from Meadview, Arizona, and 44 miles from Dolan Springs, Arizona. Access is from U.S. Highway 93 through Dolan Springs, on the Pearce Ferry Road.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The picnic facilities at South Cove area were originally constructed below the high water elevations, and were not usable during periods of high water. During the last period of high water in 1998, the facilities were damaged and were removed from the area by the National Park Service. Since the water levels have decreased, the picnic facilities have been replaced in their original location.

The existing picnic facilities at South Cove receive tremendous use by the public because of the proximity to the water and the shade the structures provide. The facility serves as a picnic area for many residents of northern Mohave County, and for visitors from outside the local area. The need for the facility is normally the highest in the spring and fall, and it is also used during the summer months for water-based recreation.

Constructing new picnic facilities above the high water elevation would allow for use of the facilities at any water elevation. The picnic area would provide facilities for use by the handicapped public.

ALTERNATIVE CONSIDERED

The alternatives analyzed included: Alternative A: No Action and Alternative B: Construct Picnic Facilities (management-preferred alternative). There were no other alternatives considered for this project.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The environmentally preferred alternative is the alternative that will promote NEPA, as expressed in Section 101 of NEPA. This alternative will satisfy the following requirements:

- Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
- Assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
- Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable or unintended consequences;
- Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
- Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and,
- Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Alternative B is the environmentally preferable alternative because overall it would best meet the requirements in Section 101 of NEPA. It would assure for all generations a safe, healthful, and esthetically pleasing surrounding. Establishing a picnic facility would allow for a wide range of beneficial uses of the environment by visitors without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable or unintended consequences. It would achieve a balance between population and resource use, and permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities.

MITIGATION AND MONITORING METHODS

Mitigation measures are specific actions designed to minimize, reduce, or eliminate impacts of alternatives and to protect Lake Mead NRA resources and visitors.

Monitoring activities are actions to be implemented during or following construction.

The following mitigation related to the construction of a picnic facility would be implemented under Alternative B.

Natural Resources

Vegetation and Soils:

- Topsoil will be conserved and replaced and disturbed areas would be mulched, seeded, and/ or planted with native seed where determined appropriate by NPS Resource Management Specialist (Restoration).

- The area will be surveyed prior to construction and appropriate plants, as determined by the NPS Resource Management Specialist, will be removed and replanted after construction.
- All operations will be confined to the work limits of the project. Damaged areas will be restored, repaired, and plants would be replaced.

Wildlife

- Signs would be posted and trash receptacles will be placed near the picnic area to prevent wildlife from habituating to human food sources.

Air Quality:

- Dust control measures will be employed by the contractors to minimize the impacts to air quality associated with ground disturbance and construction activities. All necessary reasonable measures will be taken to reduce air pollution, including wetting down dry materials to prevent blowing dust, utilizing or removing excavated materials as soon as possible, and keeping the project neat, orderly, and in a safe condition at all times.

Cultural Resources

- The project area has been inventoried for cultural resources and no archeological sites were located (Ervin 1986, Gushue 2003). Construction of the picnic facility and associated activities will have no effect on cultural resources. If concealed archeological resources are encountered during project activities, all necessary steps will be taken to protect them and to notify the park archeologist and/or cultural resources specialist immediately.

Visual Resources

- The proposed picnic facilities have been designed in accordance with National Park Service standards and will not result in a visual intrusion.

Visitor Use and Experience, and Public Safety

- The parking lot adjacent to the proposed picnic facility will be temporarily closed during to construction activities.
- Barriers will be placed and maintained by the contractor to protect existing facilities and the public from construction operations. Danger signals, lights, and warning signs would be placed around the construction zone.
- An orange, plastic safety barrier fence will be used to designate the construction limits

The following matrix summarizes the mitigation measures required for the selected alternative.

Impact Topic	Mitigation Required under the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B)	Responsible Party
Vegetation and Soils	<p>Topsoil will be conserved and replaced and disturbed areas would be mulched, seeded, and/ or planted with native seed.</p> <p>The area will be surveyed prior to construction and appropriate plants, as determined by the park restoration specialist, will be removed and replanted after construction.</p> <p>All operations will be confined to the work limits of the project. Damaged areas will be restored, repaired, and plants will be replaced.</p>	Project manager and Resource Management Specialist (Restoration)
Wildlife	Signs will be posted and animal-proof trash receptacles will be placed near the picnic area to prevent wildlife from habituating to human food sources.	Project Manager
Air Quality	Dust control measures will be employed by the contractors to minimize the impacts to air quality associated with ground disturbance and construction activities. All necessary reasonable measures will be taken to reduce air pollution, including wetting down dry materials to prevent blowing dust, utilizing or removing excavated materials as soon as possible, and keeping the project neat, orderly, and in a safe condition at all times.	Project Manager
Cultural Resources	<p>If concealed archeological resources are encountered during project activities, all necessary steps will be taken to protect them and to notify the park archeologist and/or cultural resources specialist immediately.</p> <p>Lake Mead NRA staff will consult according to 36 CFR 800.11 and, as appropriate, provisions of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.</p>	Cultural Resource Specialist
Visitor Use and Experience	<p>The parking lot adjacent to the proposed picnic facility will be temporarily closed during to construction activities.</p> <p>Barriers will be placed and maintained by the contractor to protect existing facilities and the public from construction operations. Danger signals, lights, and warning signs will be placed around the construction zone. An orange, plastic safety barrier fence will be used to designate the construction limits</p>	Project Manager

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Following the implementation of the mitigation and monitoring measures, the environmental consequences of implementing the preferred alternative are as follows:

Soils and Vegetation

Approximately 16,000 square feet or 0.37 acres of desert soil and vegetation will be modified under this alternative. The vegetation in this area consists primarily of desert shrubs and grasses, including creosote, rabbit brush, bursage, and brittlebush. Disturbance would be mitigated through topsoil replacement.

Cumulative Effects: Development in the South Cove area has permanently modified approximately 50 acres of desert habitat. This project would add to that acreage slightly. However, considering the area was modified permanently by the construction of Hoover Dam, and the amount of acreage available nearby that has not been modified, this is considered a minor impact.

Conclusion: The overall acreage that would be permanently modified under this alternative is 0.37 acres. Since this impact would result in perceptible impacts, localized in a relatively small area, not affecting the overall viability of the plant community, it is considered a minor impact. Based on the evaluation of impacts, there would be no impairment to soils and vegetation under this alternative.

Wildlife

The wildlife in the impact area is primarily small mammals, lizards, and birds. It is not considered a high quality habitat since it is so close to a parking lot and areas of high visitor use.

There would be temporary impacts to wildlife during construction from disturbance by vehicles, noise, and human activity. It is likely that most wildlife would move out of the area during construction, though some individuals could be lost due to the use of heavy equipment.

After construction, the wildlife could move back into the area. The area would be permanently modified, and 0.37 acres of low quality habitat would be permanently lost.

A picnic area could lead to increased use by wildlife, such as small mammals and birds, due to the presence of food sources from humans. This could cause unnatural concentrations of certain species, such as ravens and ground squirrels, and habituation of wildlife to human food sources. Signs would be posted and trash receptacles would be placed nearby to alleviate this impact.

Cumulative Effects: Development in the South Cove area has permanently modified approximately 50 acres of wildlife habitat. However, this is considered minor when compared with the acreage modified due to the construction of Hoover Dam. In addition, there is a large amount of protected high quality wildlife habitat nearby the project area. Therefore, this impact would be minor.

Conclusion: Since no species of concern is present in the project area, habitat is not critical for survival, and other habitat is available nearby, this alternative would have negligible to minor impacts on wildlife species. There would be no impairment to wildlife based on the impacts associated with this alternative.

Cultural Resources

Direct and Indirect Effects: There are no cultural resources in the project area. This project will have no effect on cultural resources.

Cumulative Effects: No effect

Conclusion: There would be no impairment to cultural resources based on the impacts associated with this alternative.

Air Quality

Air quality around the project area would be temporarily impacted due to construction activities. Construction equipment would create dust when disturbing the soils, and generate smoke and fumes. Required mitigation, including the use of low sulfur fuel, when available, and watering disturbed areas, would reduce these impacts.

Cumulative Effects: Air quality in Lake Mead NRA can be periodically impacted by regional dust and haze. This project would not add to that impact.

Conclusion: Impacts to air quality would occur temporarily, during construction, and can be controlled by mitigation. Therefore, this alternative would have minor impacts on air quality in the project area. There would be no impairment to air quality as a result of implementing this alternative.

Visual Resources

This alternative would place additional structures within an existing developed area. The structures would be built to NPS standards to reduce the visual impact, but it would be a permanent change to a small area.

Cumulative Effects: The South Cove area has been improved in the past several years, with the addition of parking lots and restroom facilities. This alternative would provide an additional picnic area. However, since it would be constructed within an existing developed area, and visitors have the expectation of human made structures, the overall cumulative impact would be minor.

Conclusion: This alternative would permanently change the visual resources, but it would occur within an existing developed area where visitors have expectations of human-made structures. Therefore, the impact would be minor to moderate. There would be no impairment to the visual resources based on the impacts associated with this alternative.

Visitor Experience and Public Safety

This alternative would result in improved visitor services at South Cove. Additional picnic facilities would be available for visitor use year round, regardless of lake levels. Visitors requiring accessible facilities would benefit from the implementation of this alternative.

Cumulative Effects: Visitor use may continue to increase at South Cove as other facilities in Arizona and elsewhere in the region reach capacities or are too crowded. This could lead to increased use of the facilities, and increased need for maintenance and replacement. Overall, there could be a greater demand for services in the South Cove area. Until that time, the new picnic areas would provide visitors with additional facilities that could improve their recreational experiences.

Conclusion: In the short-term, the additional picnic facility would benefit the visitor by providing improved visitor services.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping for this environmental assessment was conducted through press release notifications between November 6 and December 6, 2002. No comments were received. Public notice of the availability of this environmental assessment was published in local newspapers, and on the Lake Mead NRA Internet Web site (<http://www.nps.gov/lame>). Individuals and organizations could request the environmental assessment in writing, by phone, or by e-mail. The environmental assessment was circulated to various federal and state agencies, individuals, businesses, and organizations on the park's mailing list for a 30-day public review period. Copies of the environmental assessment were made available at area libraries. Approximately 75 copies of the EA were distributed for public review.

One comment letter was received on the EA during the 30-day comment period that extended from between January 21 and February 19, 2003. The letter was sent by the Mohave County Board of Supervisors and expressed support of the picnic facility construction. None of the comments received raised substantive issues not already addressed in the EA.

CONSULTATIONS AND PERMITTING

No permits are necessary in order to complete the proposed project.

The state of Arizona Legislature authorized the establishment of the State Lake Improvement Fund Program (A.R.S. § 5-382) for the purpose of providing funds for developing facilities for public boating purposes. The proposed project was submitted to this program as a grant proposal.

All new recreational facilities are developed in accordance with the *Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines* (Recreation Facilities, 36 CFR part 1191). The NPS is currently conducting an accessibility assessment of buildings and recreational

The NPS has consulted with appropriate Native American groups as required by the various laws, regulations, and executive orders. South Cove is the terminus of raft trips starting from the Hualapai Reservation. These raft concessions are an integral part of the economic development for the Hualapai Tribe and the use of the various facilities at South Cove are important to these concessions. Though the park has not received comments from the Hualapai Tribe specifically on the EA for the construction of a new picnic area at South Cove, the Hualapai are actively involved in improvements to the South Cove area.

The Lake Mead NRA staff will notify and consult concerned tribal representatives for the proper treatment of human remains, funerary, and sacred objects, should these be discovered during the course of this monitoring project.

BASIS FOR DECISION

The National Park Service selects Alternative B because it will provide much needed recreational facilities at the South Cove area. It will allow for the construction of a picnic area that could be used at all possible lake elevations, and will provide facilities for use by the handicapped public. As determined in the EA, the facility can be constructed with only minor impacts to park resources.

IMPAIRMENT OF PARK RESOURCES OR VALUES

The effects of the preferred alternative will not impair park resources or values necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the park's enabling legislation. Impacts documented in the EA and summarized above will not affect resources or values key to the natural and cultural integrity of the park or alter opportunities for enjoyment of the park. The preferred alternative will not impair park resources and will not violate the NPS Organic Act. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the impacts described in the environmental assessment, the agency and public comments received, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker in accordance with National Park Service *Management Policies, 2001*.

CONCLUSION AND BASIS FOR DETERMINATION

Based on the analysis completed in the EA, the capability of the mitigation measures to reduce, avoid, or eliminate impacts, and with due consideration of public response, the NPS determined that there are no cumulative, indirect effects, or connected actions with the potential for significant impacts. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required, and the selected action may be implemented as soon as practical.

I find that the preferred alternative does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.9), an environmental impact statement will not be prepared for this project.

Recommended:

William K. Dickinson, Superintendent
Lake Mead National Recreation Area

Date

Approved:

Jonathan B. Jarvis
Regional Director, Pacific West Region

Date